



Press Information

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For immediate release

Concerns over new Australian national commercial vessel safety system highlighted in recent IIMS survey

The International Institute of Marine Surveying (IIMS) has released details of a poll undertaken in the past week amongst its Australian members, which reveals serious concerns in the industry about the operation of the new national system for commercial vessel safety introduced by the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) on 1 July 2018.

The survey of 60 local IIMS members found that over half of respondents believe the new system will result in vessels being less safe to operate; 29% said they will be far less safe.

Nearly two-thirds of respondents (64%) said they found it either difficult or very difficult to access information, understand legislative requirements and get decisions from AMSA, while 79% said that AMSA did not listen to surveyors, or takes their views into account when formulating policy and systems.

The introduction of the national system has seen responsibility for commercial vessel safety transfer from local state and territory agencies to a single national agency, AMSA. The system has been promoted as improving marine safety while reducing red tape and streamlining costs. However, feedback from IIMS marine surveyor members following the introduction of the system suggests it is having the opposite effect.

Problems with the system raised by surveyors include a major increase in the amount of paperwork they have to complete, difficulties in interacting with AMSA's systems, a lack of resources allocated to prepare for the changes and fears that vessel safety will be compromised due to changes in the scope and frequency of vessel surveys.

"The reality is that AMSA has bowed and sold out to industry on every occasion," commented one surveyor. "The tail wags the dog in this case. They have not made any decisions based on a positive safety outcome. The mantra is to reduce requirements and reduce costs. This, however, has no long-term benefits and achieves only the opposite," he added.

"Recent changes to survey schedules ignore generations of experience of accidents and incidents," commented another. "People are going to die if this isn't stopped."

Adam Brancher, IIMS immediate Past President and managing director of Kedge Marine Surveyors based in Hobart, said that while the implementation of the national system had been known months in advance, the detail of its operation was only made available to marine surveyors five weeks ago. As a result, the amount of paperwork required has increased five-fold, increasing the time it takes to complete a survey and, ultimately, making it more expensive for vessel owners.

He said, "Part of the problem is that vessel records previously held by state agencies have not been transferred to AMSA, resulting in surveyors having to provide a lot more information to AMSA."

AMSA recently announced an extension to the levy-free period for commercial operators to three years. However, according to survey respondents, commercial operators will eventually end up more paying more in the long run.

"In three to four years' time when the majority of mandatory inspections will be due and government funding is exhausted the impact on industry will be catastrophic," commented one surveyor.

Another surveyor raised the issue of vessels up to 12 metres being classified as "non-survey" and subject only to self-assessment rather than a mandatory survey.

"This is the same system that delivered the fatal Malu Sara incident that saw the vessels not undergo any survey compliance checks, rather a trust and verify model that failed," he said.

Mike Schwarz, IIMS Chief Executive Officer said, "It is clear from the number of completed surveys returned to IIMS and the strong depth of feeling from respondents that the new scheme and the upheaval it has caused is of major concern amongst member surveyors in Australia."

He added, "Given the depth of those feelings, I would encourage AMSA and the Australian National Government to take note of the survey results and urge them to reach out to the Australian marine surveying sector as a matter of urgency to understand their frustrations and to find a workable resolution that is acceptable for all parties involved."

Ends.

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